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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, November 12, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOW DOES IT TASTE?" Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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"The proof of the pudding is in the eating!" That old proverb is as true today as it ever was. For even modern science with all it's labor-saving machinery hasn't devised a robot that tastes and smells.

No one but a human being can judge the flavor of the food human beings eat. It's for this reason that the Bureau of Home Economics makes a taste test a regular part of its experimental procedure whenever food quality is in question.

The taste judges are members of the Department regularly employed in other work. Different groups of persons make up the juries to taste the various foods. In every case the taste-testers have had enough experience to know a good, bad, or an indifferont quality when they taste it. They show consistent judgment. Their taste standards are high.

But that isn't all. They are able to analyze their own reactions to what they taste. And they can express these reactions on the score sheet they are using. The judges of meat quality usually go through a period of training before they are qualified to serve on a tasting jury.

The list of foods these judges taste includes, bread, cakes, jellies, jams, canned goods, meats. In fact this list is nearly as varied as the experiments the Bureau conducts.

For over eleven years judges have been tasting meat in connection with a long-time experiment on meat quality. In 1925, another government agency decided to find out how certain production factors affect meat quality. They wanted to know if different rations fed to animals would show different results in the meat from these animals. And if handling methods, age of the animals, or the breed would make any difference.

So they started the experiment, and it's been going on since. They keep records on each animal throughout its life. Then they send standard cuts from each of these animals to the Bureau of Home Economics. Here is written the final chapter in the experiment.

A member of the staff takes these cuts -- pork loins, beef ribs, hams, legs of lamb -- or whatever they happen to be. And she cooks all the similar cuts in exactly the same way. She not only uses the same method of cooking, but she sees by her meat thermometer that all of them get to the same stage of doneness.

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Of course, the taste-testers know nothing of all this. If they did it might possibly influence their judgment. All they have to do is to taste the unseasoned samples before them and record their opinions. When these opinions are assembled, they show just how the judges rated the meat for quality.

After the experimenters find which meat the judges rated best, they are able to trace back through their records to find how they raised the animal that gave that meat. Needless to say producers of livestock should welcome such definite information.

I had never really thought that so many things affected bread flavor until I heard of the experiment the Bureau of Home Economics is carrying on now. They are varying, one at a time, all the different things that can possibly affect the flavor of bread.

Several times a week they ask judges to give their opinions of bread samples. One day the bread is made from three different kinds of flour. The next day the variable may be the method of baking -- the kind of oven -- or the temperature -- or something else important. Each factor is tested at least twice, and if the results don't jibe, even more often.

If a member of the bureau staff is making jelly, she calls on taste-testers. These judges usually are members of the foods staff who are familiar with standards for jelly. They also express themselves in terms of a score sheet.

Another scientist may be determining the best fats for deep fat frying. Then, a most important part of her results are the opinions of the judges who taste potato chips fried in the different fats.

In one experiment last year, the taste-testers tried dozens of biscuits. They were judging the eating quality and the flavor of different kinds of fats used to shorten the biscuits.

Nearly every year, the Bureau conducts an experiment on the table quality of potatoes. These potatoes are of different varieties. Or they have been produced under different conditions. Soybean quality tests are another year-to-year experiment.

In all of these experiments the opinions of the taste-testers are really important. Because flavor and aroma are two of the biggest items in food quality, and so far there is no other way to judge them.

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